

READING GROUP GUIDE

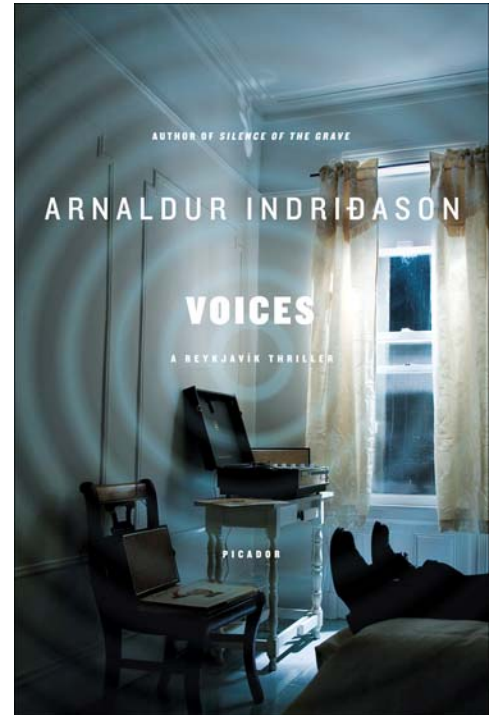
Voices

A Novel

by Arnaldur Indridason

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Voices* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Voices*.

About the Book

Warning: The following contains spoilers and key plot points, enter at your own risk

Gold Dagger Award-winning author Arnaldur Indridason brings us back to the wintry underworld of Iceland in this new Reykjavík thriller featuring Inspector Erlendur. This time the victim is Santa Claus, found murdered in the basement of a classy hotel with his pants around his ankles. The victim turns out to be the hotel's doorman, a loner named Gudlaugur who plays Santa every Christmas for the kids. Erlendur is shocked at the almost universal indifference to the doorman's death, as the hotel employees and even Gudlaugur's family seem to take no interest in what happened to him. Erlendur finds himself strangely drawn in as he learns the details of Gudlaugur's sad life, and, without knowing why, books a room at the hotel where he

was murdered. As Gudlauger's past as a failed child prodigy unfolds, Erlendur finds himself haunted by the voice of the young soprano, which calls up voices from the own past, and threatens to bring his own secrets to light. Struggling to keep his private life from crashing down on him, Erlendur sifts through the clues and the lies pervading the hotel to find out who killed Gudlauger, and why. More than a simply mystery or genre piece, the rich characterizations and setting in *Voices* offers much to discuss.

Praise for Arnaldur Indridason

"The best new series I've read this year."—Harlan Coben

"Another top-notch mystery from Indridason, its lyrical melancholy matched by the depth of its characterizations."—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) on *Voices*

"Classic mystery fiction, both compassionate and thrilling. Indridason is about to become one of the brightest stars in the genre's dark skies."—John Connolly, author of *The Unquiet*, on *Jar City*

"One of the modern masters of the police procedural. *Voices* is replete with wonderfully flawed characters . . . and insight that at times makes you want to weep. I cannot recommend it highly enough."—*January Magazine*

"A commanding new voice . . . puts Iceland on the map as a major destination for enthusiasts of Nordic crime fiction."—Marilyn Stasio, *The New York Times Book Review* on *Silence of the Grave*

"A wonderful storyteller. . . . It's impossible to put the book down once you begin reading."—*The Globe and Mail* (Canada) on *Voices*

About the Author

Arnaldur Indridason was born in 1961. He worked at an Icelandic newspaper, first as a journalist and then for many years as a film reviewer. He won the Glass Key Award for Best Nordic Crime Novel for both *Jar City* and *Silence of the Grave*, and in 2005 *Silence of the Grave* also won the CWA Gold Dagger Award for best crime novel of the year. Indridason lives in Iceland, and he and J.K. Rowling are the only authors to simultaneously hold the top three spots on the Icelandic bestseller list.

Discussion Questions

1. Crimes happen everywhere, but police work can be very different from country to country. What do you think of the methods employed by Erlendur, as compared to those you may have seen on television or in books that are set in the United States, or elsewhere? Is it easier to catch criminals in Reykjavik than it is in New York or Los Angeles? Consider, for example, the fact that Erlendur entertains the idea of shutting down and sequestering everyone in the hotel.

2. Erlendur is very concerned about his privacy. Throughout the book, different people in his life pry into his personal affairs, and he continually tells them to mind their own business. Yet Erlendur doesn't seem to be as touchy when it comes to other people's privacy. For example, he tells his colleague Sigurdur Oli to back off, while at the same time asking him very private questions about trying to get his wife pregnant. Why does Erlendur do this? Is he always a detective, even with his friends? What does this say about his particular vulnerabilities?

3. Erlendur reads accounts of deaths. We learn that this is related to the tragic loss of his brother when he was a child. But why does he do this when it is too painful to remember what happened? Does it comfort him, or is he torturing himself? Do you think this childhood incident may have influenced Erlendur to become a detective?

4. When Erlendur lets his former boss Marion Briem take part in the case, Marion thanks him for "handing him some morsels." Why is he so thankful to be included in the case even though he's retired? Why does Erlendur give in and let Marion take part even though he gets on Erlendur's nerves? Is it out of pity, or does Erlendur worry about what he's going to be like when he gets old himself?

5. Why is Erlendur so stirred by Gudlaugur's story, and why is he unable to go home? Does he worry that he himself is like Gudlaugur, a loner and failure? Or does Erlendur identify Gudlaugur as a child with his lost brother? Might Erlendur see Gudlaugur as both himself *and* as his lost brother?

6. What do you think is the connection between: the battered child which Elinborg is handling, Erlendur's childhood experience, and the present case? Is the connection only in Erlendur's mind? Or do we naturally make connections like this? Does Erlendur only understand life in terms of "cases?"

7. Late in the novel, Erlendur unearths a lie in Stefania's story. We are told that there is nothing more valuable to a criminal investigation than discovering a lie. Why? Wouldn't it be more useful if everyone told the truth? How do lies, once they are uncovered, move a case forward?

8. Investigator Erlendur is the central character in the story. Yet his story is not told through his own voice, in the first-person narrative, but rather in the third-person narrative. Why do you think Indridason chose not to have Erlendur tell the story in his own voice? How might it change the story if Erlendur were recounting everything in his own words? Would he be a less reliable narrator?

9. What do you think of Erlendur's tactics? With some people he is gentle, with others he is inquisitive, and at times he can be aggressive in his interrogations. Why do you think that he uses different tactics like this? How does he decide where and when to be more aggressive? If you were conducting the investigation, would you have been more or less aggressive than Erlendur?

10. Why do you think Erlendur wanted to tell Valgerdur, the woman who took the saliva samples, about what happened with his brother when he had never told anyone? Do you think

that he just needs to get it off his chest and it's easier to tell a stranger? Or do you think that he really likes Valgerdur, and he wants to try to make a new start? Do you think there might be a future between him and Valgerdur?

11. When Eva Lind presses Erlendur for answers about why he wasn't there for her in her childhood, Erlendur blurts out: "People talk too much...People should shut up more often. Then they wouldn't give themselves away so much." What do you think about this? Does this reveal anything about how Erlendur views himself, and how he looks at life? When it comes to how he treated his family, does Erlendur view himself as a criminal?

12. Were you surprised to find out that Ösp had committed the murder. Did she seem a very likely suspect when we met her in the beginning? At the end, she says she does not know why she killed him. Maybe it was for the money, maybe because of her brother, maybe her own addiction, and maybe it was because she herself had been raped and just flipped out. How responsible do you think she is for the murder? If the Englishman, Henry Wapshott had killed Gudlauger for the records, would he have seemed more guilty than Ösp, or less guilty? Do you think that Erlendur might be less inclined to blame Ösp for what happened given that she reminded him of his own daughter and her struggles?

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